

SERVICE OBLIGATION TRACKING SYSTEM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

FOR GRANTS AWARDED IN FISCAL YEAR 2005 AND ANY YEAR THEREAFTER

Introduction to Service Obligation Tracking System (SOTS) FAQs

In 2007, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) contracted Optimal Solutions Group, LLC (Optimal) to establish and maintain the National Center on Service Obligations (NCSO), which is responsible for tracking the service obligations of scholars/obligees funded by OSEP Personnel Development Program grants awarded in federal fiscal year 2005 and any year thereafter. In order to facilitate this process Optimal developed the Service Obligation Tracking System (SOTS) a secure, online database used to collect scholar/obligee contact and service obligation information for tracking the fulfillment of service obligations.

NCSO and the U.S. Department of Education (ED) developed the following guidance document in response to questions frequently asked by grantees, scholars, obligees and employers, regarding the SOTS. This document does not cover all aspects of the service obligation regulations and requirements or the SOTS, and should not be used alone. The grant regulations and requirements are available on the NCSO Web site at <http://www.serviceobligations.ed.gov/programRegs.cfm> or you may contact the NCSO Helpdesk at <http://www.serviceobligations.ed.gov/contact.cfm> for additional assistance.

General Information

1. What is the Service Obligation Tracking System (SOTS)?

The Service Obligation Tracking System (SOTS) (<http://www.serviceobligations.ed.gov/sots.cfm>) is a secure, online database used to track the fulfillment of service obligations. The SOTS has three types of users: Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs), scholars/obligees and employers. IHEs are responsible for entering the contact, training and service obligation details of funded scholars/obligees. Scholars/obligees upload their updated contact and employment information in the SOTS and employers access the SOTS to verify the employment of scholars/obligees.

2. How can you learn more about the SOTS?

The SOTS is maintained by The National Center on Service Obligations (NCSO), <http://www.serviceobligations.ed.gov/>, sponsored by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/index.html>, at the U.S. Department of Education (ED), <http://www2.ed.gov/about/landing.jhtml>. NCSO provides regulatory and technical assistance to SOTS end-users through its Helpdesk, which is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. ET. SOTS end-users may contact the NCSO

Helpdesk (<http://www.serviceobligations.ed.gov/contact.cfm>) by calling the toll free hotline at 1-800-285-NCSO (6276) or via e-mail at info@serviceobligation.org.

Scholars/Obligees Operational

For more information on scholars'/obligees' service obligations requirements and how to access the SOTS please visit <http://www.serviceobligations.ed.gov/scholars/>.

3. How do scholars/obligees create their account in the SOTS?

After IHEs submit scholar/obligee records in the SOTS, scholars/obligees are sent an automated invitation e-mail providing them with instructions on how to log into the system and create their account. The instructions are also found below:

1. Click the secure link within the e-mail which follows the sentence: "The following link will enable you to access your account:"
2. The secure link will direct the scholars/obligees to the "Rules of Behavior for Department of Education-Sponsored Website" page. Review the information and agree to the terms by checking the box next to "I agree to the Terms" at the bottom of the page.
3. On the next page select the state in which the IHE that provided the grant funding is located and select Submit.
4. On the next page create a username, password, and secret question and answer. This information will be used to access the SOTS in the future.
5. Upon first login, review and certify your contact and service obligation details.

Once scholars/obligees have created their SOTS account they may log into the SOTS from the NCSO Web site at <http://www.serviceobligations.ed.gov/scholars/login>. Scholars/obligees will use the username and the password they specified when creating their SOTS account.

4. How do scholars/obligees enter employment information in the SOTS?

Scholars/obligees enter their employment information by completing the Employment Record Form(s) in the SOTS. To enter an Employment Record, follow the instructions below:

1. Log into the SOTS at <http://www.serviceobligations.ed.gov/scholars/login>.
2. On the "Scholar Main Menu" navigate to Section E. "Eligible Employment" and select the hyperlink "Add Employment Record."
3. Scholars/obligees will be directed to the Employment Record Form.

The Employment Record Form contains two sections. The first asks for contact information of the employer and the second asks for details of the position. The employment records may

be saved and edited at a later date by selecting “Save for Later” at the bottom of the form. To submit an Employment Record Form(s) scholars/obligees must select “Save and Submit” at the bottom of the form. Once an employment record is submitted an automated notification e-mail is sent to the employer requesting verification. **ONLY SUBMITTED EMPLOYMENT RECORD FORMS ARE PROCESSED BY THE SOTS. PLEASE NOTE THAT SUBMITTED EMPLOYMENT RECORD FORM(S) CANNOT BE EDITED BY SCHOLARS/OBLIGEES.**

5. How do scholars/obligees working as teachers receive 12 months of credit for a 9 month school year?

Scholars/obligees fulfilling their service obligation as a classroom teacher receive 12 months of service obligation credit for teaching one school year. However, to receive all 12 months of credit, scholars/obligees must indicate 12 months of employment in the Employment Record Form on the SOTS. The start date of the position will be the first day of the school year and the end date will be 364 days later. For example, for the 2009-2010 academic year, a scholar/obligee must enter an employment record of 8/18/2009-8/17/2010, even though the obligee may have only worked from 8/18/2009 through end of the academic year on 5/22/2010. Summer school positions should be entered as separate records using the start and end dates of the summer term or portion of the term the obligee taught.

IHE Operational

For more information on the responsibilities of IHEs and how to access the SOTS, please visit <http://www.serviceobligations.ed.gov/colleges/>.

6. How does a grant project director provide secondary user access to the SOTS?

Project directors may add one secondary personnel account per grant in the SOTS by following the instructions below:

1. Log into the SOTS at <http://www.serviceobligations.ed.gov/colleges/login>
2. On the “Main Menu” page, locate the “Grant Personnel” section and select the link – “Add personnel”
3. Complete all the required fields including, First Name, Last Name, and E-mail address.
4. Select the “Save” button at the bottom of the page to add the personnel to the grant profile.
5. On the “Main Menu” page, locate the “Grant Profile Summary” section and select the hyperlinked Grant Number that you want the secondary user to access.
6. On the “Grant Profile Summary” page for that grant, scroll down to Section C “Assign Secondary User.”
7. From the drop down menu select the name of the personnel you want to assign as the secondary user for the grant.

8. After selecting the correct name select the “Update Grant” button at the bottom of the page. You have now successfully added a secondary user and will be directed back to the “Main Menu” page.

Once a secondary user is added in the SOTS, they are sent an automated e-mail notification providing them with instructions and their username to create their SOTS account. The username for secondary users is the assigned grant number and the password specified by the secondary user upon first login. This process can also be facilitated by contacting the NCSO Helpdesk at <http://www.serviceobligations.ed.gov/contact.cfm>.

7. How does an IHE upload and edit scholar/obligee records in the SOTS?

Project directors or assigned secondary users may add scholar/obligee records in the SOTS. The scholar/obligee record consists of contact, training and service obligation information. To add a new scholar/obligee record in the SOTS please follow these instructions below:

1. Log into the SOTS at <http://www.serviceobligations.ed.gov/colleges/login>
2. On the “Main Menu” page, locate the “Scholar/Obligee Information” section and select the link – “Add New Scholar/Obligee Record”
3. From the drop down menu, select the grant number that you want to enter scholar/obligee records under.
4. Complete the required fields on the “Scholar Record Part 1” page (marked with red asterisks) and select “Create Scholar Record.” This process checks to make sure this record has not already been created.
5. Select “Create Additional Records” to continue adding new records, or select “Go to Part 2 of this record” to complete the current record.
6. If selecting “Go to Part 2 of this record” complete required fields marked with red asterisks.
7. Select “Save and Submit” or “Save for Later.”
8. If selecting “Create Additional Records” repeat step 4.

Note that Parts 1 and 2 of all records must be completed and submitted for the record to be processed by the system.

Scholar/obligee records can be pending or submitted. Pending scholar/obligee records are those that have been saved for later, and have not been submitted to NCSO for processing. IHEs can edit pending scholar/obligee records or submitted records of enrolled scholars/obligees. Submitted records are those that have been completed and processed by NCSO. Submitted records for completed/exited scholars/obligees can only be edited by NCSO and with the authorization of the IHE to ensure data integrity. Scholars/obligees with records that are submitted in the SOTS and who have completed at LEAST one academic year of the training program are provided access to the SOTS.

Employer Operational

For more information on the Personnel Development Grant Program, please visit <http://www.serviceobligations.ed.gov/employers/>.

8. How do employers complete the verification process?

The employment verification process must be completed within the SOTS to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of data reported. If employers are unable to complete the employment verification online within the SOTS, employers should contact the NCSO Helpdesk at <http://www.serviceobligations.ed.gov/contact.cfm>.

NCSO CONTACT INFORMATION

National Center on Service Obligations

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Toll Free Hotline 9-5 EST: 1-800-285-NCSO (6276)

For TTY, dial 701 when connected.

Fax: 1-301-576-5187

E-mail: info@serviceobligation.org

The NCSO Web site and the Service Obligation Tracking System are located at <http://serviceobligations.ed.gov>.